

By Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.)

The major victory by Republicans this last election is widely attributed to a call for fiscal restraint and reform. Further, many of my conservative colleagues have long been calling for the same, and remain committed to putting our fiscal house back in order. That said, more than a mere trimming back on discretionary spending is needed. Our financial house is on far shakier ground than just can be accounted for by waste fraud and abuse.

Did you know that in 2011, every discretionary dollar that the federal government spends will be borrowed? In other words, entitlement programs and the interest on our national debt will require every dollar that the federal government brings in as revenue. Did you know that in 2011, the federal deficit will be a record \$1.5 trillion? To put this in perspective, that is over \$4800 in debt spending this year alone for each and every citizen of the United States. It is clear that our nation's budget situation is unsustainable and is a reality that will come to a shock to even many of those who have been calling for reform.

Today President Obama proposes his budget for FY2012 and the House of Representatives considers a bill finalizing the remainder of the FY2011 budget. While we absolutely have to stop the runaway spending of recent years, unfortunately slashing discretionary spending will not fix our problem. We could zero out all discretionary spending, and we still wouldn't fix the long term budget trajectory as our entitlement programs continue to grow.

Where does this leave us? First, we need to determine which functions of the federal government are truly essential for our nation's security and prosperity. The President needs to stop proposing more spending and nifty new programs and instead only fund programs that are truly vital to our nation. I believe maintaining a strong defense is a vital, Constitutional responsibility of the federal government, but I think much of the rest of our discretionary spending is optional, not essential.

Secondly, it is essential that we deal with our run away entitlement programs before there is a total economic meltdown. While it is always easier to kick the can down the road, we are approaching the edge of the cliff and need to reform our entitlements now. Rep. Paul Ryan, Chairman of the House Budget Committee, has proposed what he calls "A Roadmap for America's Future" that would address these issues in a responsible manner. While not everyone likes everything in Ryan's proposal, that is often the nature of meaningful reform. America's elected leaders must address today's problems while improving our nation's future.

This Congress, I specifically asked for a seat on the House Budget Committee because I believe that our nation's budget situation is unsustainable. There is no easy path forward. Instead, we must make the difficult but necessary decisions today that will give our children and grandchildren a brighter future. We need to be saving for our grandkids' future, not giving them \$4800 a piece in debt every year of their lives.

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